

Civil Rights Committee Meeting Minutes November 4, 2003

Meeting took place in the conference room of the USDA Service Center in Redmond, Oregon. Meeting was called to order at 8:05 am.

Committee members present included: Gina Kerzman, Sue Brandt, Harvey Bush, Maria Godines, Marybeth Smith, Janice Knutz, Loren Unruh, Kathy Naegeli, Lee Ko, Denise Troxell, Michelle Richwine, Pam Davis, and Gary Briggs. Bob Graham, NRCS State Conservationist, and Larry Frey, FSA State Executive Director joined the meeting at 10:41 am.

Topic: National Civil Rights Review (Gina Kerzman)

Gina reviewed commendables, recommendations, and required actions (Handout). Commendable highlights include: the civil rights binder developed for each office, civil rights training at OACD in 2002, EQIP work with tribes, SWCD/NRCS conservation workshops to reach non-traditional customers, availability of interpreters for Spanish-speaking customers, SCEP hiring, the Civil Rights Team poster, Medford's "Request For Assistance" form that requests RSNO information, and Salem's Braille signs on the restroom doors. Recommendations include: expanding Oregon's media list, placement of "Y Justicia Para Todos" signs in plain view of the entrance, including members of the State Partnership in compliance reviews, continued and increased outreach efforts, continued leadership communication to partners on the value of diversity, initiating a statewide accessibility survey, the development of a recruitment plan to address disparities in the Oregon workforce, increased SEPM coordination with National SEPMS, and continued cultural awareness activities. The list of required items was short, and included the leadership team's remediation of accessibility violations found and written communication to the leaseholders of these offices.

Gina also reviewed Oregon's response to the National Review (Handout). She indicated that some of the accessibility findings are in question. Loren Unruh added that we can measure tension on doors.

Gina also indicated that we need to get the word out to the field offices that we do have the option to hire interpreters, if they are needed.

Topic: Evaluation of Civil Rights Compliance Review Process (Gina Kerzman)

Gina led a discussion on the coordination of civil rights reviews with FSA and RD. We all agreed that commonalities make it a logical direction in which to move. Additionally, this issue is being discussed at a national level. Gina received the review schedules from FSA DDs; they are on a 3 year rotation schedule which cannot be changed according to Harvey Bush. NRCS is on a 5 year schedule. One idea that was discussed was that NRCS and FSA could accept each other's accessibility findings, and Harvey offered that NRCS is welcome to use FSA's reports.

The Oregon FAC made a decision to use RD's accessibility standards. RD utilizes both Oregon and Federal accessibility standards, and uses the most restrictive between the two. So where RD has an office, they are the lead on accessibility. However, RD has only 7 offices, whereas we have 38. So the question moves to accessibility requirements in the other 31 offices. RD was to provide training to the CR Team about accessibility. However, the position in RD that would handle this has been vacated, and the responsibility is being reassigned. **Action:** Gina will request RD's accessibility standards, the form(s) they use, and will contact them regarding

training. **Action:** The Team decided that when Bob Graham and Larry Frey joined our meeting in the afternoon that we would ask their ideas on how we could best share information and promote consistency between the agencies, and request that they ask the Oregon FAC if we can use RD's form.

The Team discussed RD's accessibility findings in Pendleton, and the costs that are associated with using the most restrictive standard.

We looked at the review form and discussed how we could make it better. We can edit the form and add boxes for notes/explanations. **Action:** Denise will look at the review guide for opportunities for edits (like adding text boxes) to make it more user friendly. Team members should submit ideas to Denise by 1/3/04. She will prepare for the next meeting in February.

Action: Loren will go through the accessibility items in the review guide to look for improvement ideas.

Some FSA CR Team members and Connie Holmquist have not had Compliance Review training. This will be handled in-house.

Bill White and Ron Alvarado are developing a tracking system to reflect cost-share obligations by RSNO. This information is/will be built into SCIMS and ProTracts.

The review process and associated paperwork was reviewed. Generally reviews flow as follows:

- The review team divides up the reviews(usually two CR Team members per review), and decides who will be the lead on which reviews;
- Contact the Field Office (District Conservationist) to set up a date for the review. This can be done via email, but remember to keep documentation;
- Sends the letter (with the review guide) to the Field Office, and cc their supervisor at least one month ahead (more if possible);
- Complete the review;
- Within 30 days, the write up of the review is due. A cover letter accompanies the write up, and is from Bob to the appropriate supervisor. Use the format the Gina has provided;
- The office has 30 days to address agreed-to items. This does not necessarily mean the items are completely resolved within 30 days, but may mean that action to address the item is in process;
- Gina keeps track of the reviews on a spreadsheet; it includes information such as the date of current reviews, date of last review, and tracks agreed-to items;
- When all items have been addressed, the review is closed out. This is initiated when the supervisor (in most instances, a Basin Team Leader) sends a letter to Bob stating that all items have been addressed. Bob then issues a response that the review is closed.
- **Action:** Gina will prepare a procedural checklist for reviews.

FY03 Civil Rights Compliance Review findings were discussed. The following common items were noted: USDA and non-USDA publications co-mingled on brochure racks (we generally recommend separation of USDA and non-USDA publications due to the fact that some non-USDA publications do not contain a non-discrimination clause and we don't want to create the perception that it is our publication), lack of measurable goals for basin plans, and questions from the offices regarding the definition of a limited resource producer.

Gina reminded the team to invite Leadership Partners (John McDonald and Larry Ouja) to participate in the review process and to contact her with dates of reviews.

Topic: DN-714/Recruiting Goals (Sue Brandt)

Sue Brandt led a discussion on how to read, understand, and use the DN-714. The DN-714 is considered confidential information. She and Gina use the DN-714 to develop the FEORP (Federal Equal Opportunity Recruitment Program) plan. Sometimes the DN-714 is referred to as the PATCO Report (this stands for Professional, Administrative, Technical, Clerical, and Other). What it tells us is what the relevant civilian labor force (CLF) looks like nationwide (by race, sex, and national origin) for each of the categories (Professional, Administrative, Technical, Clerical, and Other), and how this compares to Oregon NRCS. Oregon does an additional report using statewide CLF statistics for its own use.

UI refers to the under representation index; the closer this number is to 100, the closer we are to parity in that category. RI refers to the number to hire to reach parity. But we are not in a big hiring mode, so what we're doing, or the best we can do, is to swell our applicant pool of trainees. And Sue indicated that she counts on SEPMS to get the word out about the SCEP Vacancy Announcement. There was not a good response last year, and she believes this to be primarily because we did not know until relatively late how many positions we could support and because of the hiring freeze. She would like to see about 5-7 SCEPs per year. Knowing funding prospects and consequently getting the Vacancy Announcement out sooner will help.

The group brainstormed ideas for recruiting. They include: visiting individually with professors, email directly to professors, and presentations to classes and Ag Councils (OSU) to promote NRCS. Sue would like to see all positions and announcements sent to everyone on the minority media list.

Gina and Loren have developed a recruitment packet. It contains: Challenging Careers brochure, SCEP Fact Sheet, Qualifications for Soil Conservationist, NRCS-What We Do brochure, Optional Application form, and a Fact Sheet on Careers in NRCS. **Action:** Gina will send a copy of the recruitment packet to each CR Team member.

Recruiting goals for Oregon include females, African Americans (including females), Hispanic (including females), and some Asian/Pacific Islander (including females). Disability information is not on the DN-714. We can develop our own reports to generate, but the CLF data is old. Gina is working on SCEP Press Release to highlight our SCEP trainees. This is an alternative to paying for classified ads for lots of different papers. Team members' ideas to increase outreach for the SCEP included aligning with Extension and 4H and use of minority employment organization to distribute the SCEP Announcement.

Topic: Vision for the Civil Rights Committee/Q&A (Bob Graham/Larry Frey)

Bob Graham thanked the CR Team for their hard work and continuing efforts to coordinate the process with FSA. He indicated he would speak for a bit and then he and Larry would take questions from the Team.

Bob discussed program delivery outreach, and asked this question: How can we do the best job of meeting the needs of our clients given our resources? The most obvious (but sometimes most overlooked) answer is to find spokespeople who can convey our message (examples include community leaders, SWCD directors, and volunteers). Bob encouraged the Team to continue exploring and expanding partnership opportunities.

The Team asked Bob and Larry about the coordination of the accessibility portion of the review with FSA and RD. We understood that the FAC agreed to use RD's information, but explained the issue of only having 7 RD offices versus 38 NRCS offices, and how the person from RD who was to train us is leaving their position. The Team asked Bob if we are to require all offices to follow RD's guidelines (even though there are only 7 RD offices). Bob indicated, and the Team agreed, we are ready to accept RD's guidelines, but we need training and the forms to be used. The Team asked Bob: 1) Can the FAC agree to one form?; and 2) Can the FAC agree that all will accept each other's accessibility findings (the FAC previously agreed to accept RD's accessibility findings in the 7 offices where they are the lead)? Bob's answer included the question: does it result in better accessibility for our clients? He indicated that the State FAC would gladly entertain a proposal regarding an alternative way to handle the coordination of accessibility findings, and would likely give consideration to support sending such a proposal up to the National FAC. **Action:** Loren, Harvey, and Gina will develop a proposal for the State FAC. Bob also recommended involvement of RD, FSA, and NRCS State Administrative people. Larry was in agreement with Bob on the proposal idea.

Bob informed us that there will be an All Employee's meeting sometime in FY04. Diane Guidry and Lesley Kelly are co-chairing the committee organizing the event, and are looking for ideas.

Larry inquired about another session of Working Effectively with Native Americans, as he would like to send more FSA employees. Bob was in agreement.

Topic: Statewide Accessibility Evaluation (Loren Unruh)

Item 6 in the National Civil Rights Review requires Oregon to conduct an accessibility review in each NRCS office. Our answer stated that in FY 04 Lesley Kelly, Loren Unruh, and Chris Martin would complete this work. Loren asked if RD's requirements are to be rolled into this review. The Team had a lengthy discussion on how to complete this task. Several ideas on how to accomplish the review were tossed out and discussed. Since the national review didn't specify a due date for the accessibility review (we indicated it would be done in FY04), we need to find this out. If it does not have to be completed in FY04, the Team agreed that the accessibility review would be best coordinated with lease expirations (if possible) and the Civil Rights Team would conduct the accessibility reviews.

Topic: SEPMs (Gina Kerzman)

Gina indicated SEPM plans are due by 1/12/04.

Topic: Review of Civil Rights Team Action Plan (Gina Kerzman)

By Laws: Bob has approved, and they have been sent to Larry. Harvey indicated that Larry has seen them. **Action:** Harvey will follow up with Larry on the by laws.

Presentation to OSU Ag Council: Janice K. and Lee K. are meeting with Ag Council 11/19.

Recruitment: Marybeth Smith requested that SEPMs meet with Sue B. for ½ day (part of next meeting) to share recruitment lists.

Review of Civil Rights Compliance Review Process: done

Revision of Civil Rights Binder: "How to Use This Binder" by Corey needs to go out to the Team

Addition of Lynda Wilder (FSA) as SEPM: done

Exit Interviews: Lee has conducted one exit interview. Lee asked if the interview is shared. Sue indicated that reviews are done to find out if changes are needed, so Sue would be a

logical person to receive the interview. Sue recommended that parts of the interview may be sanitized, or Lee could wait a period of time before submitting. She also let us know that any other CR Team members can perform exit interviews; contact Sue for forms.

Website: Most current information has been posted

CR Binders: needed in Hood River, Forest Grove, and the PMC. Gina is working on this.

Career Fairs: on-going; recruitment packets have been developed

Civil Rights Compliance Review Training for new Team members: part of February meeting

Assistance to Hood River: Sue has sent posters. Marybeth indicates that Hood River needs help with accessibility.

American Indian Workshop: no definite answer yet

PowerPoint Presentation on Oregon Demographics: not completed

AEP/FEORP: work continues

Newsletter: "For One and All" done

Civil Rights News Releases: target was two per FY; 2 are completed, and 2 are yet to be done

Women in Ag: annual meeting coming up in April; Gary to attend.

Workshops: SWCDs have had several workshops since 7/03 (Lee, Michelle, and Denise indicated their SWCDs have put on workshops in the recent past)

The next meeting will be held February 3, 2004 in the conference room of the USDA Service Center in Redmond, Oregon.

The meeting adjourned at 1:00 pm.